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ABSTRACT

How writers come by, find, or create their sense of purpose and whether readers are at all aware of or affected by this purposeful, sometimes elaborate rhetorical structure the writer labored to construct are questions that have motivated critical discussions of the construction of purpose. Using think-aloud protocols, the construction of purpose can be tracked and a more precise view of the way purpose infuses the thinking process in individual writers and readers can be reached. The view of purpose as a complex web of meaning which writers build and which readers in their own, independently constructive way infer, leaves several provocative questions unanswered. This view asks for a refinement of the theoretical understanding of how individual purposes interact with context and convention in the creation of text and for a broader vision of reading as both a constructive, cognitive process and a rhetorical event in which readers use their knowledge of human purposes to build a meaningful and coherent text. A more robust view of literate purposes may aid teachers in helping students take control of their own reading and writing processes in the service of their own rhetorical purposes. (Twenty-five references are attached.) (RS)

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Center for the Study of Writing

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THE CONSTRUCTION OF PURPOSE IN WRITING AND READING

Linda Flower

July, 1988

University of California, Berkeley
Carnegie Mellon University

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THE CONSTRUCTION OF PURPOSE IN WRITING AND READING

By

Linda Flower
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Purpose is problematic. Everyone agrees that it is an admirable thing: we encourage students to "have" one and we are justly impatient with texts that don't. However, our traditional ways of talking about purpose—as that singular, statable entity one should possess—seem painfully limited. We may question if a simple "authorial" purpose as Foucault defines it, even exists. We may conclude that the purposes behind any rhetorical or any human act so multifold, so entangled and even contradictory that in the attempt to describe them, the notion of a willed, intentional act simply evaporates.

The current critical discussion has complicated our definition of purpose in healthy ways, trying to distribute much of the credit for human agency across a larger social and contextual reality. Reflecting its roots in literary criticism, this discussion has focused primarily on literary texts (broadly defined) and has tended to locate purpose either in the text itself or in the social context of that text. However, this analysis leaves us facing an uncomfortable fact: as writers ourselves, laboring over our journal articles, term papers, and love letters, we can not escape the need to produce purposeful prose—nor do we wish to. As theorists we have not developed equally sensitive ways to describe how an individual writer creates a unique rhetorical purpose for each text he or she writes, within the constraints of context. In the end we need a theoretical language that can recognize the shaping power of language and context and still respect and explain individual, human agency.

My interest in contributing to this conversation is motivated by two questions and an observation. The observation first. Over the past ten years I have pored over the transcripts of people thinking aloud, watching them struggle not only to plan a paper and affect a reader but to fathom and form their own intentions and construct new meanings. These protocols are only data—a best effort to gather information on what we can't see directly—but they continually impress me with the constructive nature of writers' cognition and with the purposeful, goal-directed nature of such thinking. This raises the question of how such a dynamic situation operates: How do writers come by/find/create their sense of purpose? And are readers at all aware of or affected by this purposeful, sometimes elaborate rhetorical structure the writer labored to construct?

Although I can't answer those questions, I hope this paper is a step in that direction. What I would like to offer is a data-based discussion of the way purpose plays itself out in some of the readers and writers I have observed. My aim is theoretical. I want to use these observations not to test a hypothesis or make a statistically significant claim, but to show how looking closely at the cognition can help us track the *construction* of purpose and can give us a more precise view of one way purpose infuses the thinking process in individual writers and readers .

Talking about Purpose

Cleanth Brooks made it difficult for English professors in good standing even to talk about authorial purpose, by urging literary critics to beware the intentional fallacy. One should not impute intention to an author by assuming that the author had intended the particular "meaning"

one reads into a text. A healthy caution. On the other hand, classical and modern rhetorical theory is based on the notion of a rhetor as a purposeful agent in a rhetorical context who seeks through persuasion or identification to affect the minds of others. Likewise, good teachers of writing are expected to infer the purpose(s) behind a student's text, to acknowledge even unrealized intentions, and to help develop the student's purpose rather than impose their own. Rhetoric and composition exist in a world of rhetorical purpose. Yet our theory says little about how individual writers fabricate the vigorous personal sense of purpose we value—and our textbooks say less. The process of purpose-making in Aristotle is reduced to "stating the case," because the rhetor is presumed to come with a purpose firmly in mind. The intellectual work of invention is devoted to discovering proofs that secure argument. Similarly, Booth's rhetorical stance is taken on a pre-existing sense of purpose. But what would happen if we tried to step behind the scenes and explore how purpose itself is constructed and represented in the mind of the rhetor?

Let me pose, as a case in point, a text I wish to return to later in this discussion. How shall we describe the rhetorical purpose of Stephen Jay Gould's typically multi-layered, highly rhetorical introduction to *Ever Since Darwin* (11-12)?

> "One hundred years without Darwin are enough," grumbled the noted American geneticist H. J. Muller in 1959. The remark struck many listeners as a singularly inauspicious way to greet the centenary of the *Origin of Species,* but no one could deny the truth expressed in its frustration.
>
> Why has Darwin been so hard to grasp? Within a decade, he convinced the thinking world that evolution had occurred, but his own theory of natural selection never achieved much popularity during his lifetime. . . . It is widely misunderstood, misquoted, and misapplied. The difficulty can not lie in complexity of logical structure, for the basis of natural selection is simplicity itself—two undeniable facts and an inescapable conclusion. . . .
> [a five-paragraph discussion of the theory follows]
>
> Thus, Darwin's apparently simple theory is not without its subtle complexities and additional requirements. Nonetheless, I believe that the stumbling block to its acceptance does not lie in any scientific difficulty, but rather in the radical philosophical content of Darwin's message—in its challenge to a set of entrenched Western attitudes we are not yet ready to abandon.

Dedicated readers of Stephen Jay Gould already know the party line of his larger purpose: we need to understand Darwinian evolution more carefully and come to terms with our place in a non-human-centered, biological system. But having stated the "purpose" of the text thus, we have not distinguished it from the dozens of other Gould texts on the theme, nor have we achieved any insight into how Gould conceived and fulfilled the unique purposes he had for this Prologue to this book.

To discuss such purposes with accuracy is difficult because any speech act is highly overdetermined. It is not the result of any single purpose, but the confluence of many. College professors write papers in order to enter the academic community, to get tenure, to sway opinion and change practice, to state the importance of XYZ, and/or because they are compulsive meaning makers and can't help it. In the text itself, a given passage, a key word, or an image of a grumbling geneticist may well be reflecting multiple purposes driven by the demands of content, voice, claims in the making, or the conventions of the discourse—forces which may work in harmony or at complicating cross purposes to one another. In the face of this complexity, we often retreat. The very notion of authorial purpose has received a bad name because it is sometimes equated with simplistic single-liners

of the sort, "Dickens wrote *Great Expectations* to show us that . . ." or with equally narrow statements about *the* "theme" or "meaning" of a poem, a symbol, or a powerful line.

However, even though some ways of talking about a writer's purpose are reductive and all ways are necessarily partial, we can't afford to avoid the subject. We need an interactive picture of writing as a purposeful act. Such a picture would include, for instance, a broad cultural perspective in which purpose is inseparable from the social assumptions that help shape the text—assumptions which are often unexamined and may even seem unreachable. A cultural critic might point out an unexamined purpose of this sort in Gould's insistence that we understand the "great man," Darwin, correctly—a purpose, institutionalized by universities, that justifies academic scholarship. Or one might locate purpose in Gould's attempt to reduce this problem to a conflict within the Western belief system—a purpose that cultural critics have themselves valorized and institutionalized .

Our discussion of rhetorical purpose might also include a more text-based analysis such as Burke's description of form as the "arousing and fulfillment of desires" (*Counter-Statement*). Some aspects of the form Burke describes, such as dramatic reversals or careful progressions toward an effect, show the marks of active intentionality and crafting. Other aspects of form, such as beginnings and endings, are so highly conventionalized that they may enter the rhetorical plan without a second thought on the part of the writer. In fact, forms and conventions can so quietly dictate local discourse moves that writers may not realize they have made a "choice." The text may end up being at "cross-purposes" to itself, and the "seams" or disjunctions in the text become a window onto multiple but unintegrated rhetorical purposes at work. However, Burke notes that the role of forms and conventions is diminished when one turns from literature to writing in which information becomes more central, as in the texts studied here. As Burke puts it, "atrophy of form follows hypertrophy of information" (144).

Social/cultural and textual views of purpose each uncover distinctive dimensions of the rhetorical purpose embodied in texts. However, each gives us only a limited glimpse and speculative understanding of another part of the picture—the dynamic web of purpose that is constructed by the individual writer during composing. If we are to avoid reducing purpose to the tracks it leaves in text, we need a complementary cognitive view of reading and writing as rhetorical acts. We need a more integrated theory.

Consider, for example, the difference between some of the conventions that represent purpose in expository texts and the purposeful process one sees in writers at work. In texts, writers often signal one level of their purpose with a preface, an introductory paragraph, or a problem/purpose statement of the sort that heads this paper. And they may signal the linear plan that organizes the paper with previews, transitions, and indicators of key points and conclusions, as Gould did with "Thus Darwin's apparently simple theory. . . ." and "Nonetheless, I believe. . . ." When purpose is explicitly marked in a text it gives the impression of orderly, linear, controlled intentionality and singularity of purpose.

However, when we look at a transcript of a writer thinking, even under the unusual condition of thinking out loud, it is as though we turned the nose of the kaleidoscope. The illusion of order and simplicity is replaced with an initial image of chaos and complexity. Writers at work do not decide on "their purpose" as the textbooks advise; they create a web of purposes. They set goals, toss up possibilities. They may respond to one of those ideas with a negative evaluation, which can lead to new criteria for what they have to do, if only they could figure out how to do it. They think through possible content and leap back into goal setting, generating provisional, tentative ideas of what they want to achieve, working hypotheses that they may soon ditch or even forget. They worry over questions ("Do I want to ...?"), confusions, and conflicts as a workable plan or cherished goal seems at

loggerheads with other goals or a piece of text they don't want to throw away. They create a multidimensional network of information—a web that radiates in all directions, anchored to points unknown.

We need to distinguish between this interconnected body of goals, plans, and criteria writers construct and the topical information they also generate, that is, that pool of ideas and pre-text about their topic that is destined for the page. Even though goals and content are naturally linked, a writer's network of purposes can not be simply equated with (or recovered from) the text. The web may contain many private intentions to which the reader is never privy, even though they quietly govern the text. Likewise writers may hold many intentions that they are unable to realize in text. A young writer trying to instantiate a grandiose plan with limited topic knowledge or only a seventh-grade vocabulary might feel the distinction between intention and text acutely. More important, because this web of purpose is an internal, cognitive construct, it embraces multiple ways of representing of meaning. That is, meanings pulled into this web might be represented imagistically or in other non-verbal, structural ways or in episodic memories of experience. For instance, one of my goals is to convey the sense of interconnected goals and cumulative complexity that comes from reading a given protocol—to convey a form of "knowing" familiar to us as literary readers that is not easily expressed in direct statement. Writers' motives might also be mentally represented as parts of a schema or in code words that point to packages of information stored in memory. As John Hayes and I proposed with the "multiple representation hypothesis," this variety of representations with which writers work adds immeasurable richness to the act of planning (Flower and Hayes, "Images Plans and Prose"). However, it is also a common source of frustration when it forces writers to translate from one highly personal or marginally verbal representation of meaning to a fully articulated, conventionally coded representation in standard written English.

Like other mental representations this web of purpose may contain a great deal of non-logical, unarticulated, associatively linked information. It is likely to contain tacit knowledge existing below our threshold of conscious awareness and to be generated by thinking processes which have become so automated they require little attention. For instance, the schema for narratives, which most of us have begun to master by age three, specifies a set of highly conventional goals. Having acquired the schema, we can carry out the plan of telling a story almost automatically—there is little need for conscious attention or active planning. However, when our goals become complex (e.g., we want the story subtly to support a point), we may rise to awareness, reflect on our knowledge and make our purpose and the goals of narrative the subject of active problem solving.

I should note that this view of cognition as a bubbling stew of various mental representations is at odds with some more dichotomous views of thought based on popular Freudianism and its sharp demarcation between conscious and unconscious knowing. Some readers of this paper, for instance, may have reserved the term "intentionality" (versus the more general term "purpose") for those purposes that are consciously held or even fully articulated. However, from a cognitive, process-oriented point of view, intentionality is a far more protean impulse and much harder to pigeonhole. For example, much of the thought that emerges, even in protocols, as goals, criteria, tentative notions, or possible plans is neither logical nor well articulated, even though it is clearly contributing to this web of purpose. Moreover, the threshold of awareness is a constantly moving boundary—knowledge and processes which were operating tacitly often become the subject of increased conscious attention when the situation demands. A cognitive view replaces the dichotomy of conscious/unconscious with metaphors that describe the changing and relative nature of awareness, using concepts such as "depth of processing," "focal and peripheral awareness," and shifting "levels of attention." A sharp distinction between conscious and unconscious seems useful only for talking about the extremes. The cognition this study

aspires to understand, then, embraces many kinds of knowing, even though the tracks of that cognition are only that—tracks in the snow from which the event is interpreted.

It should also be clear that this cognitive image of the writer's purpose as a web of intertwined goals, plans, criteria takes issue with other views of purpose many of us have found problematic. The richness of the web argues against a reductive intentional fallacy (e.g., Shakespeare wanted to expose the way Oedipal conflicts can cause. . .), as well as the fallacy of paraphrasable content (e.g., Swift's response to the Irish problem was to propose that. . . .), and against the tendency to reduce writers' intentions to a single, statable purpose. Even the writer's own after-the-fact interpretations and/or functional "purpose" statements in the text are fragmentary indicators of the purposes that guided composing. However, this metaphor of a web does not alone let us answer the inevitable question: how does this seemingly chaotic process and its multiple networks of purpose ever contribute to an integrated plan and a coherent text? How do writers construct a guiding rhetorical purpose?

Constructing a Plan in Writing

One way to approach these questions is to look closely at the data of what writers do as they plan. Thinking-aloud protocols of writers in the act of composing contain a rich set of traces of cognition. Unlike a retrospective account, they offer an extended concurrent record of the shifting content and focus of thought as writers concentrate on the task at hand. The protocol record is typically more detailed and explicit than what a writer could ever recall and is likely to capture conflict, contradictions and abandoned plans generated during the thought process. Protocols also have a number of limitations, as does any method, in that they are a record of that information that has entered the writer's conscious attention at least at the level of fleeting reference. This means that much of the writer's web of purpose (like his or her topic knowledge) remains invisible or only inferable. At the same time, when one's research is motivated by education, this limitation itself plays a useful role: it tends to focus observation on those thinking processes that are accessible to reflection and present in all writers, even those who are learning.

In a study of how expert and student writers plan, John R. Hayes, Karen Schriver, Linda Carey, Christina Haas and I observed what we began to call a ***constructive planning process*** in which writers actively constructed and integrated a body of goals, plans for meeting those goals, criteria for success, and discoveries and new ideas (Flower, et al., "Planning in Writing"). Some of the conclusions from that study are relevant here. In that analysis the notion of a web was given more concrete form as we mapped out an explicit "working goal network" for each writer based on the data of the protocols. That is, each indication of a goal, plan, or criterion was treated as a node on a network the writer was constructing, a network in which new goals and plans formed multiple links to other nodes in the plan. Tracking the growth and structure of this network let us compare the way writers manage their planning process and describe certain features of the plans they give themselves. This goal network is, of course, a theoretical construct. It reduces complexity (and hence loses information that was actually present). But it throws a spotlight on the dominant, organizing goals and the structure of the plan, and it allows us to see patterns at this level of planning that will help us understand the larger process we can't observe. Three key features of this *constructive planning process* help explain how purpose is "constructed" over the course of writing and how it can lead both to coherent and to wildly fragmented writing plans.

1. Planning is a continuing, unpredictable, and often opportunistic process. Writers may aspire to one-shot planning, but plans often emerge by a stubborn timetable of their own. The process can seem to inch forward through a temporally connected, associative string of ideas. Yet, unlike some venerable libraries in which books are shelved according

to the order of acquisition, the goals writers construct in working memory do not form a chain of ideas, organized by the order of appearance, by associations, or by the serendipity that generated an idea. Rather, this web of information has first the character of a network. That is, an individual idea can have multiple links to multiple other nodes or ideas. These links may be associative or causal ones or links of goal to subgoal and so on. We see this network of connections operating in reverse in text when we notice that a single phrase is realizing multiple, disparate goals. Secondly, this network has the character of a hierarchy—that is, certain goals form the top-level structure of the network, subsuming and integrating other goals, plans and criteria within their compass. As a result, the network that emerges over time is not a temporal log left by the process of invention, but it is, to varying degrees, a purposeful, goal-directed structure of information.

The networks created by experienced and student writers in the study mentioned above had some striking differences. The expert networks were far more elaborated; the experienced writers gave themselves a richer rhetorical problem to solve. But elaboration carries a cost: as ideas, plans, and criteria mount so does the problem of organizing and integrating the whole. Experienced writers created networks that were also more integrated at their top levels, thanks in part to planning strategies such as creating subgoals or consolidating the current network into a new plan—a strategy rarely observed in our student writers.

2. The workaday significance of this network lies in its structure and power to guide composing. But the wonder of planning lies in its ability to change. The web of purpose one sees emerging in a protocol is a dynamic structure. It is built and developed, and sometimes radically restructured at even the top levels, as the writer imagines possibilities and responds to new ideas or to his or her own developing text.

3. Although this web of purpose (and the goal network we observe) may remain under construction throughout composing, it helps guide the construction of the text. This relationship between the structure of the plan and the structure of text is as problematic as it is important An incoherent set of goals is likely to produce an incoherent text on some level. But since the network building process may extend over a series of visions and revisions, maintaining a meaningful hierarchy of one's own goals can be difficult. At other times, the structure of the network itself is not under revision, but different parts of it rise to attention and these foregrounded goals then govern composing, while other, perhaps conflicting goals stand in the wings.

The following excerpts from the think-aloud transcript of a young graduate student illustrate a few of these features. She is writing notes and later text in response to an assignment that asked her to read various brief statements on the topic of revision, to interpret and synthesize that information and write her own statement. In these excerpts we can see the interplay between her various readings of what the assignment "intended" and her own goals, interests, tendencies, and earlier plans. [The segmented comments are numbered to indicate location in the protocol. Brief pauses are indicated by dashes and written notes or text are underlined.]

52 Well maybe what I'll try and do is write down what I think of first.
53 Otherwise it will just be picking out the higher points from this paragraph.
54 And I don't know why I think that is wrong to do.
55 I guess I think that I'm supposed to do something original.
56 Ok. Revision—
57 Ok—There's a process—that experienced writers—use.
58 It is a process— that inexperienced—writers may use but not successfully

59 This is making me think of, one of the things I read was that inexperienced writers jumped into their writing and experienced writers, um, would take a little longer time to plan.

60 I guess if I want to fall in the category of an experienced writer, I should make a little more of a plan myself.

61 Um—the plan that I have made so far is simply to write down either what I know or what I remember from reading this piece about revision.

62 And then I was going to go back an look at the paper and see how my ideas fit into that structure and maybe make an overall new structure myself.

63 I'm going to look at the assignment again . . . .

.....

69 I mean because I could just make a real general statement or I could make a more precise one.

70 I don't know—which one.

71 So I'm deciding right now what to do.

72 This is reminding me what the kids I'm teaching might do.

73 They might make more out of the assignment than they are asked to do.

74 [pause] I'm just thinking

75 I guess I'm supposed to say what I'm thinking.

76 I'm thinking about the kids I'm teaching

77 But I'm trying to get my mind back to—uh, the thing I'm trying to write.

.....

90 Hmm—I'm wondering if I could write this in a way that it could be used for my students.

91 That's one of the things I was thinking about when I read this was how could I adapt this to be helpful to them.

93 And one of the things that I do when I write is I have to get some overall goal or purpose to write.

94 Um, right now I'm doing it just to make it interesting to myself.

As even these brief excerpts show, this writer has multiple goals on the boil for not only her text but her own writing process. We might also think of these ideas functioning as multiple constraints, in the sense that the the final text may have to satisfy of number of these needs simultaneously. Notice too how an association to her own students in Comment 72 (she was an instructor in the freshman course) grows into a reflection, which later emerges in Comment 91 as a possible goal for the paper. That goal, we can infer, might then embed within itself another rich and purposefully structured network of ideas, organized around what she wants her students to know.

The following comments show us another feature of planning. Even though I have stripped away the context for brevity, we can see how goals that had been momentarily pushed to the background as other goals governed composing, may reassert themselves. These moments, when forgotten parts of the network rise to attention and demand their say, often lead writers to frustration or to yet another fresh start. But at times they also lead to acts of consolidation which restructure the goal network and let it do justice to the writer's larger web of purpose. [To make this debate among alternative goals easier to follow, I have placed the key terms in the protocol in bold face.]

198 Well, I guess I'll just go with this this structure,

199 I don't know what else to do—

200 Umm—So I have my **three points and I seem to have three goals for revision**.

.....

276 My goal is [rereading the assignment] to make the statement about "the process of revision."—OK—
277 I'm not sure I have the structure right to answer about the **process of revision.**
278 Do I like my structure and talk about the **goals** of revision?
279 Looks like I'm beginning to include some **steps** for revision which I hadn't originally planned on.

.....

286 I'm just supposed to write about the *process* it says.
287 Humm—**good versus bad writers** [writes notes]
289 Humm—that's interesting.
290 Now I feel like what I originally started out to write.

.....

292 The **process of revision.**
293 I don't necessarily have to compare **good writers to bad writers.**

.....

416 No, I don't know how I want this organized—
417 Because if I talk about the three steps,
418 Then that seems to relate to what the good writers do.
419 But I want to talk about what the bad writers do too
420 Because that makes it more vivid what the good writers are doing.

This student writer is more aware, articulate and given to internal debate than many writers. But she brings into focus some of the features we see in other writers: the tip of the iceberg complexity of some goals (such as "make it interesting to myself"), the way goals (such as to adapt this for my students and make it vivid) can operate jointly—as well as the way such goals can come in conflict, and finally, the extended process by which writers construct and reconstruct a purposeful plan for the text. An open-ended task like this clearly calls for goal setting, yet one can observe some of the same features of construction and conflict operating on assigned papers and professional writing, where the constraints may make planning even more problematic.

Let me sum up the argument I have been making so far. Writing, as a rhetorical act, is carried out within a web of purpose. Some aspects of the purposes which guide writing exist in the culture and the conventions a writer uses, and many parts of this web will never rise to conscious attention or be subjected to reflective awareness. However, another part of the writer's purpose is in fact constructed in the act of planning each unique text. Writers build a network of working goals, plans and criteria and if planning becomes problematic, even those processs that often operate below awareness, such as making connections, drawing inferences, or responding to familiar cues in the situation, will rise into the spotlight of conscious attention. Because this aspect of purpose making is the product of active cognition, it gives us insight into the writer's thinking process. In the act of building a sense of purpose, expert writers are doing at least two important things—they are creating more richly elaborated networks and at the same time they are linking these plans and goals into an a more fully integrated, coherent structure. The part of this network that is accepted (or the part that is recalled) becomes the rhetorical plan that guides composing.

The performance of the writers I have observed, both expert and novice, is impressive—especially when one considers that building this plan is only part of what a successful writer must do. The problem of translating plan to prose, for instance, still looms (cf. Witte). However, this glimpse of the planning process raises an interesting question: what then is the *reader* doing, since readers too have to create a coherent text in their own minds? What becomes of this rich web of purpose and the rhetorical plan our writers have labored to construct?

Readers and Rhetorical Reading

Literary theorists have long explored the ways aesthetic goals influence (or should influence) interpretation. Recent psychological research on how purpose shapes comprehension offers additional insights. Readers bring a variety of goals to expository texts, including the goals of reading "to do" something, such as use one's new computer, versus reading "to learn" something, such as the theory of natural selection. We know that changing these goals can affect the reading strategies people use, the information they recall, and many features of prose processing in general. It can change the depth of processing (e.g., do you skim for key phrases or read and rehearse the argument to yourself?), the amount of mental elaboration done on the text, and the way information is clustered and recalled. (For a review of this work see Bransford; Frase.)

Designers of instructional texts naturally try to influence such reading purposes with priming questions, text cues, and suggested reading objectives (Anderson and Biddle). This makes sense since the agenda the readers set for themselves often overcomes the effects of text structure. For instance, when two groups of adults were asked to read and recall a house description, their recall was significantly influenced by whether they were reading as potential house buyers or prospective burglars—one group remembered the color TV, the other the leak in the roof (Pichert and Anderson). It is perhaps not surprising that we structure information around our own purposes in reading and that we recall the "text" we ourselves construct. But what about the author's intentions—do readers perceive them? And if so, does this affect the reader's constructive process?

In an imaginative sequence of studies in the 1950's Asch showed that assumptions about the author's intentions have a substantial effect on the meaning readers see. Two groups of people were asked to write down the meaning of a text which started, "I hold it that a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing. . . ." When one group was told that this statement was by Lenin, and the other that it was by Jefferson, this attribution affected "*the cognitive content* of the statement" these readers perceived (422). Asch wanted to show that knowledge of the author contributes more than a subjective, or stereotypical emotional response. He found that readers used their knowledge of the author and his historical context to interpret problematic terms such as "rebellion" (e.g., the Lenin readers systematically interpreted the term as "revolution," while the Jefferson readers saw "agitation.") These readers altered the actual propositional content of the message. In this and further studies with texts attributed to Adams, Marx, CIO leaders, etc., Asch found that readers also altered the "direction" of the message (e.g., whether the text was speaking for or against its topic) even when both groups reported the same specific content. Readers also supplied differing versions of the reasons prompting the utterance and gave the text itself different significance (such as, this is a bit of breezy journalism, or a piece to be reckoned with).

The text, Asch argued from his evidence, is not an island of meaning; it is seen by readers as a part in a part/whole pattern. In more artificial conditions when the author/context was unknown (as it is in most experiments) Asch's readers did more leveling and reduced their responses to a more literal precis. But under more normal conditions of reading and interpreting, they actively used their assumptions about intentions to form the meaning of the message. Despite his strong results, it is interesting that half of his subjects appeared quite unaware of the impact of context and asserted that knowing who the author was would make no difference in their interpretation.

In many ways Asch's work complements observations of I. A. Richards and later work in literary and rhetorical theory and offers empirical support for at least some of the claims made by writers such as Phelps, Bartholomae, Bizzell, Fish, Iser and Schmidt who argue for various constructive processes in reading. The meaning of a text is not an

immutable feature residing in splendid isolation in the text itself. Instead it is a private construct created by a writer influenced by both text and the context in which he or she is reading. We might say that Asch's readers at some point aligned themselves with an interpretative community or a discourse community in which features in the text then became "cues" to the creation of a given reading.

Asch's work also suggests that the role of the perceived author should not be dismissed lightly even in our enthusiasm for the autonomy of the text or the constructive process of the reader. Because we prize the suggestive ambiguities and the multiple meanings literature strives for, we do need to be especially wary of readings based on an intentional *fallacy* in interpreting such texts. However, if we assume that a good reader will (or even could) ignore indications of an "author" in the name of a purer reading of the"text" we may misrepresent *how the reading process works as a psychological process*, at least for expository texts. Inferences about the writer's intentions appear to be an essential building block—one which readers actively use to construct a meaningful text. Because readers are participants in a rhetorical situation in which communications have a purpose, recognizing or attempting to infer those intentions is, indeed, a reasonable response.

Trying to unravel the place of authorial purpose in a reader's response only makes sense if we have a cognitively complex image of that purpose. So let me note some of my own premises. First, the authorial purposes which drive the creation of texts can not be reduced to after-the-fact authorial statements, historical inferences, or even in-the-text conventional statements of purpose. The web of purpose writers create is a *cognitive construct*: Although it may well harbor information concerning the dominant "theme," or the "meaning" one reads about in blue book exams, it will also contain a cluster of goals for the effect a key paragraph should create and special criteria based on an imagined reader's response or based on a new possibility just seen in the text. It will contain plans for creating a sustained argument and anticipating points of misreading as well as profoundly complicated plans for creating a sustained voice and/or a personal stance toward one's own material and for a whole range of larger purposes for writing. Our critical tradition, and critical ingenuity, has made us expect complexity in texts, in language, and in authors as psycho/sexual/cultural entities. If we wish to talk equally well about the writer as agent and thinker and about the role individual purpose plays in composing, we need to expand our theoretical frameworks to include cognitive complexity as well. (We must also, I believe, accept the fact that we can infer only a small part of such cognition from finished text or writers' recollections and that other, richer sources, such as think-aloud protocols, are themselves still data that must be interpreted, with tests for reliability, within a theoretical framework.)

Secondly, if we adopt a cognitively sophisticated picture of purpose in the writer, we must ask: how is the author's purpose represented in the mind of the reader during the process of comprehension? Is the reader's mental representation going to reflect only to a bluebook exam vision of purpose? Or are readers, as complex rhetorical beings, likely to engage in a highly inferential interpretive process that picks up shimmers from the web? Purpose in the mind of the writer and the mind of the reader, I will suggest, are cognitive analogues—elaborate mental representations that we can only partially infer (cf. Flower, "Interpretive Acts"). However, an analogue is not a mirror image. If readers are in some way sensitive to the author's purpose, what sort of representations do they build as part their own interpretive process?

Even though it is convenient to imagine this web of purpose as an object (a noun), we are in fact dealing with a verb, a psychological process of "purposing." This intellectual and emotional event unfolds in real time as writers construct a plan for rhetorical action and as readers infer something of that web to construct their own interpretive response. In the final section of this paper I would like to look at how a group of six readers responded to two

descriptive/persuasive essays, one a cheerful, informal essay on "my job" and the other the Prologue by Stephen Jay Gould. I will draw my examples from the response to the Gould text, not to make any direct comparison to Gould's web of purpose, to which we have no access, but to talk about how the inferences these readers drew about the author's purpose played a role in their construction of a meaningful text. One purpose of this analysis is not to categorize or compare these readers—they were selected for diversity—but to build a data-based description of a ***rhetorical reading strategy*** they all employed. Rhetorical reading links reader and writer in a particularly direct way, since it is a strategy by which readers use their *inferences about the author's plans, goals, and context* to help construct a meaningful text. The strategy as it was defined in this study has a number of parallels with the "point-driven" reading strategy Vipond and Hunt were at the same time describing in readers of literary texts. They observed that while some readers brought only a "story-driven" or "information-driven" reading to short stories, others engaged in what they called a "point-driven" reading—a more complex act of interpretation concerned with seeing the "point" of plot, setting, dialogue, etc.—in which readers frequently imputed motives to the author of the literary text. Authorial purpose clearly figures in various kinds of reading; the question is how.

Let me place the observations which are to follow in a theoretical and procedural context. First, the theoretical one: Because reading is a highly constructive cognitive process, the reader's own goals, assumptions and context play an enormous role in meaning making. One can even see readers building more than one distinctive representation of "meaning" from the same text, in response to different sets of goals during reading (cf. Flower, "Interpretive Acts"). So we need to place the reader's perception of a writer's purpose in perspective; it is in no way equivalent to *the* meaning of the text. Rather it appears to be simply another piece of information (sometimes privileged, sometimes not) that readers use in constructing their own meaningful representations of a text.

Secondly, let me review the research context for this observation, which was designed to encourage reading for comprehension and to legitimize individual interpretation . The readers were adults who read frequently for their jobs, but had varying degrees of knowledge about the subject matter. They included a seventy-year-old businessman, a twenty-year-old research assistant, three English teachers and an educational psychologist. Since the processes I wanted to observe were the high-level ones which frequently demand conscious processing, I used thinking-aloud protocols in which readers were asked to think aloud as they read and/or paused to think. To encourage reading for comprehension, I told them they would be asked some questions at the end of the text.

For adults, much of the reading process is fluent; its strategies are automated. My subjects spent a good deal of their time simply mumbling along reading the text out loud. However, at certain points in reading, these automated processes are no longer adequate, and readers must rise to more conscious processing of the text. Reading protocols capture these moments. At such points people stop to draw inferences, to elaborate, or to use other problem-solving behaviors to understand and interpret the text (Waern).

However, we had discovered that reading protocols can miss much of even this conscious processing. In writing, the productive acts of planning and producing text soak up attention so fully that most of the information in focal attention is likely to be reported. But the time consuming act of reading out loud gives people ample time to think silently—to actively make comparisons, pose questions, and draw inferences that they may not stop to report. Therefore, in addition to reading and thinking out loud, readers were also prompted to state their current understanding of the text at key boundary points, such as the end of a paragraph. The text had been typed on cards, and at these boundary points readers encountered the prompt card which asked them: "What is the gist of the passage so far?"

"What do you expect will follow?" On the occasions readers fell silent and appeared perplexed, they were prompted orally with: "What are you thinking?" or "How do you interpret the text now?" Finally, at the end of the text they were asked to reconstruct what they recalled of their reading process and interpretation of the text, since this method had proved fruitful in other studies of inferences in reading (Collins, Brown, and Larkin). Together, these three techniques—concurrent report of thinking, prompted statements on the current understanding of the text, and cued recall—gave converging evidence on readers' processes and on their developing image of the text.

Under these conditions, it is possible to engage in little or no high-level interpretation. One could simply read the text aloud with an occasional elaborative comment and, at the "gist" or "interpret" prompt, merely restate some portion of the content in a brief paraphrase (as the students we have observed often do). Although the research situation encourages verbalization, it is satisfied with a response based wholly on an automated reading process and a paraphrase of content. Readers rise to more conscious processing and inferential response at a cost and for a reason. The readers I observed were not content with paraphrase. In many cases they turned to active problem solving and unprompted interpretation near the end of key units, only to find the prompt on the next card which would elicit responses such as: "Oh hell, what is the gist again. Well so far the gist is just what I said with some —a—additional information. [Details followed.]" At all these sites of more active interpretation, we should also note that readers engaged in a variety of comprehension strategies in addition to rhetorical reading. These included using their prior knowledge to interpret points or resolve difficulties, searching the text for information, and monitoring, testing and elaborating their own understanding.

Within this context, then, the rhetorical reading strategy I observed was neither a predictable move nor one required by the method of observation; it was a choice among other choices to spend cognitive effort creating a context or a sense of purpose for the text by trying to infer the author's goals or rhetorical plan.

Inferences about the Writer's Purpose

If readers take time to draw inferences and construct their own mental representation of the writer's goals, what sorts of rhetorical information do they generate in their effort to interpret the text? We can divide the rhetorical reading responses of these readers into three categories: inferences about the rhetorical plan of the text, single inferences about specific authorial intentions, and complex rhetorical scenarios which involve a number of linked inferences.

The most straightforward group of inferences served to identify the *rhetorical structure* of the text. By "rhetorical" I mean not only the ordering of information, but the structure of this text as a speech act or social transaction between Gould and his readers. Drawing on cues in the text and their knowledge of genre and conventions, readers inferred a logic behind the text's organizational plan that was based on some larger sense of the writer's purpose. They wanted to understand the "why" that governed the "what next" sequence of information. The example below is even more interesting in that it came in response to the final comprehension question.

> Okay -a- because this [the essay] was -a- what it was, celebrating the publishing of the *Origin of Species*, what he was trying to do was summarize the essence of the theory, . . and then explain the difficulties that people had accepting it.

Although this reader had been asked to recall Gould's "main ideas," she begins by summing up the underlying logic of the entire essay, linking its organization to (what she saw as) its celebratory purpose. Note too how the reader is working with a gist statement of the content which, like her inference about the plan, allows her to see the text in larger, more meaningful chunks.

The following example shows a more local inference about the writer's plan. This reader has just encountered Gould's emphatic preview of what is coming: two facts and a conclusion. But his inferences are devoted to the implicit rhetorical plan, that is, to the intentions that erected this large signpost.

> The theory rests on [he reads] "two undeniable facts and an inescapable conclusion." So he's sort of forcing the reader, manipulating, almost berating. This is something that has to be perfectly clear according to what Gould is setting us up to. This [the theory] can not be difficult.

It is, of course, not surprising to find readers attributing a purpose to a text's structure and its conventional moves. As Burke would say, the purpose of structure is precisely to arouse such expectations. We know that readers in fact use their knowledge of standard text conventions to draw a steady stream of low-level inferences which we would not see, for which there is no need to rise to conscious processing.

More interesting are those inferences which go more directly to the human motives and larger purposes of the writer. They raise the kinds of questions you might expect a person to ask, such as, what is this speaker trying to do? And who is this I'm listening to anyway? And in certain cases, these inferences became part of an extended effort to forge a coherent reading of the text. That is, readers would sometimes elaborate their sense of an underlying intention into a dramatic portrait of an author who thinks, believes and does things, who has a complex web of intentions, and who succeeds or fails at realizing those intentions in the text. These more elaborate portraits of purpose, these rhetorical scenarios, create an image of an agent who acts in some meaningful context. Their added complexity appears to give them special powers as they grow into vivid docu-dramas in which multiple speakers think and interact with each other in the mind of the reader.

At a time when we see the role of purpose excluded from so many theoretical discussions, it is important to look for the ways it surfaces in the process of writers and readers. In an earlier study of people struggling to read the federal regulations that govern small business loans, we found that readers coped with this impenetrable prose by turning abstract terms or definitions into scenarios. In this effort to interpret the text, terms such as "ineligible concern" were translated into: "Say that if a fellow has a bar and he's selling moonshine which is not taxed, and so on, then..." Readers instantiated abstractions with a concrete example, that specified an agent (which was often lacking in the text), an action, and a context. For these difficult texts scenarios accounted for between 60 and 70 percent of the interpretative comments readers made (Flower, Hayes, and Swarts).

The beginning paragraph of the Darwin text seemed to require this sort of heightened interpretive effort. Every reader found it confusing, and this reader, who had very little prior knowledge about Darwin on which to draw, created an extended scenario in order to interpret the text. The essay begins:

> "One hundred years without Darwin are enough, grumbled the noted American geneticist, H. J. Muller in 1959. The remark struck many listeners as a singularly inauspicious way to greet the centenary of the *Origin of Species*."

At this point the reader, who is clearly perplexed, comments:

> The *Origin of Species*. I'm not sure just what it — what it means, but apparently it was a book that was written in 1959, and this fellow, H. J. Muller thought that we had enough of Darwin and that we shouldn't be any—shouldn't be pursuing this particular -a- thoughts of Darwin any further.

The text goes on: "But no one could deny the truth expressed in its frustration." And the reader continues to puzzle out an interpretation:

> Apparently the *Origin of Species* -a- deals in a frustrated way, the teaching of Darwin and while he [Muller] didn't believe in them he was apparently frustrated that he didn't understand them or didn't believe in them or didn't have an answer to refute them.... This fellow Muller did not understand or believe them, but apparently has an open mind and is willing to -a- concede enough, enough to investigate it further.

This reader responds to his confusion by building an extended scenario which attributes a set of potential motives, attitudes, and personality traits to Muller, and by extension to the entire essay. One could draft an agent/action/context script from this protocol in which Muller, perceiving that we had had enough of Darwin, is himself vacillating between disbelief and multiple sources of confusion and frustration, but willing in the end to stand with an open mind.

A number of readers built scenarios at this apparently perplexing place in the text. The fact that these scenarios differed and that this reader is demonstrably wrong, shows us how clearly this is a constructed interpretation. As an attempt to create a coherent reading of the passage, this reading process looks beyond the textual elements of cohesion, unambiguous reference and form, and attempts to find coherence in some sense of human purpose.

The reader in the next excerpt shows how scenarios can serve a more focused, local purpose. This interpretative effort appears to have been triggered when the reader encountered an assertion in the text that he could not integrate into his current interpretation. (It also suggests that the reader was keeping a running record of who was taking what position on the current topic.) The text reads, "Variation must be random. . ."

> Who says? Maybe Darwin, or the nature of things, or something, or some abstract logic behind this.... Maybe according to Darwin. I mean, who said that it [variation] is preferential and comes prepackaged in a particular direction? I didn't say it, and he didn't say it, and I don't know that Darwin said it.

In these miniature docu-dramas, readers are trying out alternative hypotheses about the text by assigning intentions, roles, and statements not only to the writer, but to potential readers and to other people quoted in the text. Scenarios help readers understand the text in the way a single inference might not. Scenarios function as a simulation: "If I interpreted the text this way, what would happen? If Muller is critical of Darwin, then why is he writing this, and why is he frustrated? Maybe Gould is presenting Muller's quote because he is trying to . . . " and so on. Olson has argued that in writing, unlike speaking, one is obligated to produce what he calls an "autonomous text"—a text that can stand on its own. It needs to create its meaning without the aid of an immediate context—such as pointing or body language—and without the presumption of prior knowledge held by the reader. It is

ironic to see that even if writers are laboring to create "autonomous text," readers are hard at work trying to reconstruct that very context as a clue to interpretation.

Creating scenarios is a rather complex problem-solving strategy. It takes a good deal of effort and inferencing. Why would readers stop reading and bother to do this? Why not just read the text? One answer, I think, is that these scenarios let readers do a difficult thing: they allow people to represent to themselves a complex logical and rhetorical situation in which there are a number of forces and constraints at work. Moreover, these forces or variables interact with each other—one interpretation only makes sense if two other points are true, unless, of course, there is another explanation for the first fact, and so on. Tracing the effects of these interactions is a thinking task that humans, with their short-term memory limitations, find particularly exasperating. Yet reading and writing constantly call for decisions that are sensitive to multiple interpretations and interacting ideas—decisions which can at the same time yield a coherent text. It is interesting that these readers do not seem to opt for a more formal logical representation of the content, of the sort: If A is true then B, but not Q. Scenarios appear to offer a less cognitively demanding, yet apparently quite effective means of dealing with interactions among ideas. They locate textual coherence not merely in the logical coherence propositions, but in the ordinary logic of human intentions.

The Function of Rhetorical Reading

Getting a vague "feel for" most writers' intentions requires no special effort. But why do more? Given the default response of reading aloud and paraphrasing content at the prompt that the reader could use and given the other comprehension strategies these readers could and did employ to arrive at a gist or a current understanding, one wants to know *why* readers choose to interrupt fluent reading and *why* they tried to express their current understanding *by generating information about the writer's purpose*. What function does rhetorical reading serve that makes it a noticeable part of their repertoire?

Some of the advantages already noted, such as letting one chunk and manage information, support the cognitive process of reading in ways the reader may not even be aware of. Other functions seem to be more directly under the reader's strategic control (even though a reader asked to introspect after the fact might not be particularly aware of the process). For these readers, rhetorical reading was used first of all to establish an *initial framework* for understanding the text. That is, five of the six writers I observed created a high-level statement of the framing purpose of this text very early in the reading. The reader who didn't struggled unhappily through five alternative theories about the point of the "my job" essay she was reading (e.g., "I think this writer doesn't know what she's doing and I am not sure what's going to follow but, I predict it isn't going to be very good") until she finally saw the light ("It is suddenly becoming clear to me . . .") and then made a detailed, confident prediction of the rhetorical plan for the rest of the essay.

The first reader quoted below comes to a straightforward view of this framing purpose very early in the Darwin text (a frame which she elaborated in subsequent responses). The second reader exercises his critical distance and creates a more extended scenario of the author enlightening the masses—specifying the roles, relative IQ's, and an appropriate tone for everyone involved:

> I'm trying to figure out what he means by 100 years without Darwin are enough. Means he wants Darwin back? [Prompt at end of 1st paragraph occurs here] I guess.... I guess it's going to sing the praises of Darwin and *Origin of Species*. Formula stuff again—misunderstanding Darwin. So our author here seems to be in the possession of the truth. I mean people for

some centuries have been mistaken and Gould is going to let us know why they had so much trouble, being so dumb for 100 years. [Unprompted response within 2nd paragraph]

This initial sense of purpose creates a framework for interpreting the text which stands in contrast to a naive, information-driven focus on content. Among these readers it also appeared to be a stable framework in the sense that nearly every subsequent inference about purpose was either directly related to it, consistent with it, or simply a local inference. The power this initial representation wields also suggests one problem with rhetorical reading. It is a powerful tool, and when readers misread the purpose, they create a mental "set" that may guide the rest of their reading. This is, of course, true of any inference readers make or any interpretive schema they bring to reading. One might speculate that poor readers may make premature decisions about the purpose of a text and not display the same willingness some of these experienced readers showed to debate with contradictory information and test their hypotheses about purpose and meaning.

Rhetorical reading supported sophisticated reading in a second way by allowing readers to maintain a *critical distance from the text*. For example, in a series of comments one reader distinguishes the factual level of a statement from the inference the author wants us to draw from it; she then notes that underlining indicates the *author's* emphasis and sense of what is important; she remarks that the text sets up two ideas as separate, but she thinks they overlap, and she distinguishes between Darwin's meaning of materialism and other potential meanings. This reader appears to be drawing inferences about the author's perspective in order keep sensible distinctions between her interpretation, the author's interpretation, and the information presented or referred to in the text.

This critical reading is obviously a desirable stance. (Although as Asch showed, readers may overestimate their critical awareness and underestimate the effect of their own assumptions.) Sometimes readers actually seem ready to agree with the author, but to be maintaining their critical distance as a matter of good reading form (e.g., "A nice little if/then thing here, though I'm questioning the 'if'.").

Finally, and I think most importantly, rhetorical reading appears linked to trouble spots and *problems of interpretation*. Reading a moderately complex text seems to produce a constant stream of problems the reader must resolve in order to build a coherent, meaningful interpretation. The reader doesn't understand a term; she can't see the connection among ideas in the text or between the text and her prior knowledge. Or what she reads may conflict with her prior knowledge or current predictions about the text. Until this occurs, adult reading is a relatively automatic process, but a problem or an occasion to elaborate can shift the process into conscious attention and shift the reader into active problem-solving. Reading-aloud protocols are particularly good at capturing this level of the interpretive process.

In the example below, the reader creates a detailed scenario in order to deal with a conflict between her assumptions about Darwin and Gould's claims about the meaning of Darwin's work. One can read the thought going on in this reader's mind as a dialogue among different voices. We hear Gould, speaking out of the context of a scholarly debate, claim that Darwin has violated Western beliefs, to which the reader responds, in a more tentative voice, that she had a different impression. Then Darwin's voice, as this reader imagines it, emerges out of the context of his personal life as the reader begins a catalogue of inferences and remembered facts.

Okay. I'm going to read on. *Darwin was not a moral dolt; he just didn't care to fob off upon nature all the deep prejudices of Western thought . . . didn't care to fob off on nature all the deep prejudices of Western thought* [reads text]. I'm not sure that -a- -a- That doesn't — I'm not sure that my impression of Darwin would not be that he -a- that he took sort of an active philosophical stance to all this, but that he was just describing what he saw, and so in a sense was simply trying to give an, a moral interpretation. I don't think he was sort of actively rejecting -a- Western beliefs [as the text claims]. Now what I know about Darwin now that I look back is that he was really shy, and that he didn't want to publish this, and that he was really afraid of getting a lot of criticism. And this statement makes it sound like he was a radical going out to change the world, which I know he wasn't from what I've heard of him.

The schematic diagram below shows how this scenario allowed Gould, Darwin and the reader to interact. It presents a paraphrase of the protocol (except for the notes on "context" which I supplied) in order to foreground how the three players in this dialogue (lined up in the left column) create an extended scenario in which voices can be seen as agents and ideas as actions occurring in a rhetorical context. Scenarios of this sort appear to help readers deal with their interpretive difficulties by constructing a rhetorical event.

AGENT	ACTION	CONTEXT
Gould	claims that Darwin's theory violates Western beliefs	[a scholarly debate in the history of ideas]
Reader	has different impression	
Darwin	took no philosophical stance was just describing tried to give a moral interpretation	[Darwin's personal and professional life]
Reader	doesn't agree with claim [see quote]	
Darwin	was shy didn't want to publish was afraid of criticism	
Gould	implies a contradictory view	
Darwin	was a radical wanted to change the world	
Reader	knows that Darwin wasn't a radical	

Scenario Used to Construct an Interpretation

This reader is clearly perplexed by Gould's claim that Darwin (with his notion that evolution has no higher purpose than adaptation) violated Western beliefs. Why is she perplexed? Because Gould's assertion violates two of her own assumptions about Darwin's

intentions, namely: 1) Darwin was trying to be observational, not philosophical and 2) Darwin's personality—as she constructed it—was a shy and retiring sort, so that in order to avoid criticisms, he would not have wanted to challenge our beliefs. In effect, this reader is rewriting evolution by natural selection into a tamer theory in order to make it congruent with her inferences about Darwin's personality and private intentions.

Analysis of the protocols showed that all of these experienced readers turned at times to a rhetorical reading strategy, using inferences about the web of purposes surrounding the text to construct coherent meaning. But, one might ask, "so what?" How much stability and power do these inferences about the author's purpose have? There were two pieces of evidence to suggest that they may have had a good deal of power. One is the fact that when readers' inferences were incompatible with seemingly bald statements in the text, the text did not always win. Some readers simply refused to give up their image of what the text *should mean* (based on their inferences about the author's intentions), in the face of a conflicting information in the text itself. Other readers gaily read through statements that directly contradicted their interpretation and seemed not to notice.

A second kind of evidence for the significance of rhetorical reading comes from the frequency with which readers used this strategy to resolve difficulties. As the following table shows, if we examine the protocols of these six writers for any indication of problem spots or conflicts in the reading process, we find a total of 52 points at which readers were momentarily confused, uncertain, or in difficulty. We can then see whether these problems were resolved (10 were not) and, if so, what strategies writers used. As this analysis makes clear, rhetorical reading is just one of the strategies these readers used to deal with problems. Sometimes readers returned to the text to reread or search for information they may have missed (7 times). At other times they resolved the problem by referring to their own prior topic knowledge (a total of 6 times). However, 31 of the conflicts to which these readers attended were followed by inferences about the author's purpose. This means readers turned to some form of rhetorical reading to solve nearly 60 percent of the interpretive problems they encountered. (One instance was double coded as both a topic and scenario.) The table lets us see how these responses are distributed and distinguishes between readers' brief inferences about goals or the rhetorical plan and the more extended scenarios. Although the scenarios often contained multiple comments, they were counted as a single response.

Reader	Problems or Conflicts	Rhetorical Reading		Topic Info.	Text Info.	Not Resolved
		Goals	Scenarios			
#1	14	4	8	1	1	0
#2	3	3	0	0	0	0
#3	14	3	5	3	3	2
#4	6	0	2	0	0	4
#5	8	1	1	2	1	3
#6	7	4	-	-	2	1
Total	52	15	16	6	7	10
		31				

The Role of Rhetorical Reading in Resolving Conflicts

Although these numbers are too small to discuss statistically, this is a surprising observation. For these experienced readers, at least, rhetorical reading appears to play a meaningful role in resolving comprehension problems. On the basis of these suggestive results, Christina Haas and I designed a controlled study of experienced and inexperienced readers on a more difficult text. In that study it appears that rhetorical reading is not only an "expert" strategy the freshmen are not using, but an important tool for building a meaningful interpretive context. It may even play a role we didn't predict in helping readers infer key, unstated claims in a text.

This view of purpose, as a complex web of meaning which writers build and which readers in their own, independently constructive way infer, leaves us with some provocative questions to answer. On one level it asks us to refine our theoretical understanding of how individual purposes interact with context and convention in the creation of a text. And it asks for a broader vision of reading as both a constructive, cognitive process and a rhetorical event in which readers use their knowledge of human purposes to build a meaningful and coherent text. On another level it invites us to close and careful observation of both of these processes. We need to trace, for instance, the connections between the active, constructive cognition of readers and writers and the coherence and structure of texts. And we need to discover new ways to make the strategic knowledge we see in experienced writers and readers more accessible to our students. For me at least, the expert/novice differences I have seen in the research on planning and rhetorical reading bring me back to my own primary aims as a teacher, which are to help students take control of their own reading and writing processes, in the service of their own rhetorical purposes. A more robust view of literate purposes may help us do this.

NOTES

1. One of the most valuable forms of collaboration comes from people who are willing to think through problems with you, trying to build a conceptualization that is one step closer to doing justice to the experience of writer and readers. Although the questions raised here are far from resolved in my mind or theirs, this paper has received the invaluable help of Mike Rose, Patricia Sullivan, Stephen Witte, Andrea Lunsford, Richard Enos, and Russell Hunt.

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